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TED KOPPEL: Joining us now from our bureau in Washington, DC, are Republican Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee for eight years, and Republican Senator William Cohen of Maine, who is a former vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. And joining us from Austin, Texas: Admiral Bobby Inman, a former director of the National Security Agency and deputy director of the CIA.

As I recall, Admiral Inman, when you retired from the CIA, you did so somewhat sadly because, a) you felt you were being cut out of the loop, and, b) I think I recall at least reading somewhere that you felt that the agency was being used to make policy rather than simply implementing it. Is my memory correct?

ADM. INMAN: A little off on the second part, but not far. There were a lot of things that concerned me in 1982. One of those was the ever-deepening involvement in events in Central America and whether the conduct of those operations were going to end up doing more damage to CIA, to the intelligence community, indeed to foreign policy than it would ever accomplish successfully for the country.

MR. KOPPEL: And as to the first point, that you felt cut out of the loop?

ADM. INMAN: Well, Mr. Casey was a remarkable man, really out of another generation. He was a great operator. He would decide what he thought ought to be done and set out to accomplish it. And he wasn't at all concerned about excluding people or, in fact, lying if he believed it was necessary to accomplish his ends. For the 18 months I was essentially cut out of covert operations. He wanted to run them himself. As I understand it, my successor, John McMahon (sp), was out of the loop most of his four years. What I can't understand is everyone then presumes that Bob Gates would have been in the loop when his two predecessors weren't.

MR. KOPPEL: You make an excellent point. If both of you were cut out, it is reasonable to assume that he was. But the point you don't make is that both of you resigned over that, and he didn't.

ADM. INMAN: Well, actually John went the full four years. He really didn't resign over it, and I had committed only to do 18 months at the outset. It did not encourage me to stay on longer. But I don't think Gates ever got to the point of doing it. Having talked to him a long time about these issues when he was the middle of a crucible

MR. KOPPEL: You're talking about Mr. Gates now?

ADM. INMAN: Mr. Gates. I believe his greatest difficulty was in coming to accept himself that it was possible that Bill Casey would have lied to him. You know, I'm 13 years older. I've been through it before. But I think, if people go back and look at the reality of the time and his own difficulty in accepting that he was cut out of events going on, it does put a very different profile on the matter.

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MR. KOPPEL: Senator Cohen, a few years ago, when Mr. Gates was first nominated for the job of director of Central Intelligence, clearly enough members of the Intelligence Committee felt that he probably should not be confirmed that he indeed withdrew his nomination. Other than the passage of time, what has changed?

SEN. COHEN: Well, I'm not sure that's correct that most of the members felt that he shouldn't be confirmed. He was having a rough time at that moment, but I'm not sure

MR. KOPPEL: Enough members clearly felt that he shouldn't be that he felt it necessary to withdraw his nomination.

SEN. COHEN: It looked as though it was going to be a long, tough battle, and I think, under the circumstances, he decided it would be best for the country and for the agency that he not go forward. But what has changed since that time is that he continued to serve as deputy director to Bill Webster and did an outstanding job in that capacity, working very closely with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle in both the House and Senate. What has changed since that time, I think also, is the fact that he has put two years in as Brent Scowcroft's deputy, again working very closely with members of the House and Senate. And I think that, if you look at the totality of his record in addition to the confirmation hearings, you'll find that you have a pretty outstanding public servant.

MR. KOPPEL: Of course, the totality of his record, Senator Specter, was never what was in question. So let me put the same question to you. Without questioning that the man has had a distinguished record overall, has anything changed with regard to what caused you to have questions a couple of years ago?

SEN. SPECTER: The questions which I had in 1987 remain, but in evaluating whether Mr. Gates would be an appropriate director of Central Intelligence Agency, what he did in 1987 and before has to be added to what he has done since. And another very important factor in the total picture is what the Executive Branch is willing to tell the Congress about covert activities. And so far we have not had a resolution of the tough issues coming out of Iran-contra so that we do not have a commitment by the Executive Branch to give notice to the Congress of covert activities.

And I think all three of those factors have to be evaluated. They all bear directly upon Mr. Gates' qualifications. What he did in Iran-contra, what he's done since, and what we could expect the Executive Branch to tell the Congress, especially in the light of the fact that, when Mr. Gates was deputy director, he was not candid and forthright in his activities in preparing Director Casey's testimony, which was very important back in 1986.

MR. KOPPEL: Let's take a quick break. When we come back, though, Senator Specter, I'd like to come back to you and ask you why it is that we expect folks from the CIA, when they are testifying publicly, to engage in a candid response. We'll continue our discussion in a moment.

(Commercial break.)

MR. KOPPEL: Senator Specter, you know that a great many people at the agency believe that Capitol Hill is just a sieve. What makes you feel that they either should or would be candid, even in closed session, on covert operations?

SEN. SPECTER: Because integrity and honesty is the very basic and indispensable ingredient on relationships among people anywhere, and that applies very forcefully when you have a relationship between an Executive Branch member and the Congress.

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And if there's something that Mr. Gates wouldn't want to say publicly, he could say it in closed session. And if there was some reason to believe that somebody was going to leak it or there was some experience on that basis, there could be some action taken to limit the disclosure. But if the Intelligence Committee doesn't know the truth, the Intelligence Committee cannot perform the required lawful oversight of intelligence activities, and that disclosure is precisely what is required to avoid the calamity and the major kinds of mistakes we saw in Iran-contras.

MR. KOPPEL: Admiral Inman, and I realize you were only there for 18 months during the Reagan administration, but do you believe that Iran-contra was an isolated aberration? Or knowing Director Casey as you did, does this sound like the kind of operation that might have been duplicated elsewhere?

ADM. INMAN: I believe it was an isolated episode, Ted. But more importantly in looking forward, I believe Bob Gates' track record for integrity and honesty in dealing with the Congress as well as the rest of the government stands on its merits. And as you look at the likelihood, if he is confirmed, that he's got the top job, I don't have the slightest doubt that he will do the job not only superbly, but that the Congress will be kept as well informed as their own security procedures make possible.

MR. KOPPEL: That's quite a caveat at the end, isn't it?

ADM. INMAN: Well, not too bad. I've got a I had great working relationships with the two committees. Unfortunately, sometimes you do just have to talk to the chairman and the vice chairman. It's hard for them as well as for you. But if you really work at it security's improved a lot the last two or three years. So I'm pretty optimistic about being able to meet both of our interests here, getting on with competent, top-flight management for

the intelligence community and having a working relationship with the Hill that helps rebuild public confidence in what's going on.

MR. KOPPEL: Senator Cohen, you probably remember from your experience on the Intelligence Committee that Bobby Inman had an excellent reputation in terms of his relationship with Congress. Is that possibly one of the reasons that he was cut out?

SEN. COHEN: I don't well, that may be one of the reasons. As a matter of fact, I suspect that was one of the driving factors behind Bill Casey's determination to move the Iran-contra affair into the White House so it wouldn't have to report to Congress. I think that there were professionals like Bobby Inman and John McMahon (sp) and others and I would include Bob Gates in that category that, if they had the information, they would feel compelled because of the oversight process to notify Congress. So I think that's the purpose that it was moved into the White House.

MR. KOPPEL: And that's why, Senator Specter, I guess the evidence that suggests that Mr. Gates knew about it a couple of months before it became public and did not come to Congress is so disturbing and why I keep coming back to it.

SEN. SPECTER: Well, there's a little more than failure to volunteer. There is his role as the preparer of Director Casey's testimony, which was very misleading and was false.

MR. KOPPEL: Can you just remind us all in what respect it was misleading and/or false?

SEN. SPECTER: Sure. The Casey testimony did not talk about the diversion of funds to the contras. And there was evidence that Mr. Gates knew that when he prepared the testimony. There was a failure to disclose that there had not been a finding. There was a failure to disclose that the CIA had gone through an elaborate plan to reconstruct a finding after the fact.

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MR. KOPPEL: What do you mean by a "finding"?

SEN. SPECTER: Well, a finding is a determination by the President that covert action is necessary, and it is a written document. There are some complications as to some circumstances where it could be oral, but that important requirement was not followed, and Mr. Gates knew that. And then when they discovered that the finding had not been prepared, there was an elaborate effort made to have one and pre-date it. And these matters were known by Mr. Gates.

And the concern that we had at that time, which lingers as a significant but not inclusive or determinative factor, is that, if you take the number two man and you promote him, what kind of a background is there to have subordinates in our government come forward and tell the truth? You simply have to have that kind of a check. But I think that the weight as to what Mr. Gates did, while

very important, has to be judged with his subsequent record, and an overarching concern that I have is what are the ground rules going to be when Mr. Gates is director, if he is confirmed, as to what he is going to tell the Intelligence Committee.

MR. KOPPEL: All right. We're going to take a break. We'll have a chance for a couple of closing comments from Senator Cohen and Admiral Inman when we come back right after this.

(Commercial break.)

MR. KOPPEL: Let's pick up, Admiral Inman, on the last point that Senator Specter made, the likelihood that Bob Gates, as DCI, would fully share with the appropriate congressional committees or their chairpersons covert operations.

ADM. INMAN: Ted, I don't think there's any question that he would. I think the larger issue, though, is that there are not likely to be that many covert operations. The question is what kind of leadership will he give in dealing with the vastly larger problems out ahead? And my plea is for a standard once again of a presumption of innocence until guilt is proven and a look at a great record for competence and integrity and so to remember yourself what it's like to try to construct what somebody else says they did for a testimony when you don't know whether to believe them or not.

MR. KOPPEL: Senator Cohen, on the same issue, and I don't know whether you feel the covert issue is relatively minor, but pick it up any way you want.

SEN. COHEN: Well, I think it is a small part of the overall intelligence responsibilities that the new director is going to have to assume. And I would agree that, based upon his performance, certainly with respect to Senator Boren and myself, Bob Gates has performed admirably. He has, to the best of my knowledge, informed us of every single covert action during the time he served as deputy director. And the relationship that he's established with us while serving as Brent Scowcroft's director (sic/many mean "deputy") at the National Security Council as such has been totally outstanding. So I expect no problem in that category whatsoever.

The larger issue, as Bobby Inman has just indicated, is where do we go from here? Not only as Senator Specter has talked about in terms of the timely notification to members of Congress, but what about the allocation of resources in dealing with human intelligence and trying to deal with the dynamics of change in the world? I think that's where the full responsibility is going to come to bear.

MR. KOPPEL: Gentlemen, I thank you all very much. Senator Cohen, Senator Specter, Admiral Inman, good of you all to be with us.